



STATE OF WASHINGTON

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

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Gov. Locke to speak at 'GEAR UP' Summer Institute at UW

OLYMPIA — As the state's most prominent and vocal supporter of education for all students, Gov. Gary Locke will be the featured speaker at closing ceremonies for the state GEAR UP Summer Institute in Seattle at the University of Washington HUB Ballroom Friday, Aug. 17, at noon.

The GEAR UP Summer Institute is a series of four weeklong events at the UW. Since early July, nearly 1,000 middle school students visited the UW campus as part of an innovative program to increase the number of low-income students who go to college.

"If we're serious about creating higher education opportunities for all our citizens, we need to do more to make our students ready for the rigors of college," said Gov. Gary Locke. "GEAR UP is a great way to help students realize they can get a college education if they work hard, study hard and take part in building their future."

The summer institute is a key component of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a federally funded initiative that reaches out to all corners of the state. The program creates partnerships among higher education, K-12 schools, state government, community organizations and the business community.

Washington received a five-year, \$15.5 million grant under the program, which is jointly administered by the Office of the Governor, the Higher Education Coordinating Board and the UW. Another six local GEAR UP partnerships also serve students in communities across the state.

Three previous weeklong events hosted students from the Lower Yakima Valley, the Columbia Basin, and King County. This week's event will feature students from Aberdeen, Elma, Hoquiam, Parkland, Pasco, Quincy, Renton, Seattle, Tacoma, and Taholah. Students from Wapato, and Yakima also are attending this week's institute.

As part of the event, students select a "major" before coming to campus and enroll in a series of courses that respond to their interests. Participants in the institute's aeronautics and astronautics major use UW laboratory equipment to measure the thrust of an actual rocket. The experiment is part of Prof. Scott Eberhardt's Aerospace Propulsion course, which he designed especially for GEAR UP students.

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Students attend a college fair with representatives from higher education institutions across the state. They have a chance to tour workplaces and other colleges and universities in the Seattle area.

Students also participate in job shadowing on the UW campus and at local businesses. UW President Richard L. McCormick joins students on Friday morning each week for an information-sharing session. The week's events end each Friday with "graduation" ceremonies and a career luncheon.

"GEAR UP provides important opportunities to inspire young people and show them that a college education is achievable," McCormick said. "Whether it happens at a place like the University of Washington or at another college or university, the important message is 'you belong here, and there is a clear path for you to get here.'"

The national GEAR UP program was created to address the barriers that students from low-income families face in preparing for higher education. Nationally, just 47 percent of low-income high school students enroll in college or a trade school, compared with 82 percent from higher-income families. Moreover, 22 percent of college-qualified high school students from low-income families don't pursue higher education — compared with just 4 percent from higher-income families, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Reaching young people early to get them thinking about college is essential, said HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard.

"We need to make sure every student in Washington knows the powerful impact college can have on his or her future," Gaspard said. "Education is the gateway to economic opportunity and a reinvestment in one's community."

The approach of GEAR UP is to reach students early (starting in seventh grade) and to make sure they have access to the right preparatory courses for college. The program emphasizes mentoring throughout the school years, educational transformation in K-12 schools and college scholarships. The program pairs public schools that have a high proportion of low-income students with universities and community colleges, as well as community organizations and local businesses.

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